

London on a Budget – Visiting England’s famed capital city doesn’t have to break the bank

Living abroad provides each and every one of us the unique opportunity to travel, but the thought of traveling to London, where the dollar only gets you about half a British pound, can put a damper on travel plans.

Fear not! You can see and experience the best that London has to offer without breaking the bank.

As a matter of fact, some of the best London experiences can be free.

Try these favorites:

Walking is one of the best (and least expensive) ways to experience a new city, especially in London, where cab fares are quite pricey. If walking isn't for you, buy a day pass or a pre-paid Oyster Card and ride the London Underground, also known as “the tube.”

And if you really enjoy walking, taking a leisurely stroll along the deep blue waters of the meandering Thames will bring you past many of London's most famous sites.

Situated on the river's south bank is the historic Globe Theater, where Shakespeare worked and performed many of his greatest plays. The building, which burned down for the second time in 1644, was faithfully reconstructed in the 1990's. Visitors can again enjoy plays at the historic theater during the summer; in the winter, the theater is used for educational purposes, and tours are available.

Just a short walk to the east is the London Bridge, which inspired the well-known nursery rhyme *London Bridge is Falling Down*. It obviously fell down several times because the current bridge is the fourth to exist in this site. Though it's not as architecturally attractive as some of the world's more renowned bridges, the famed structure continues to draw a crowd.



Continue heading east on the river walk and you will come to the Tower Bridge, an iconic symbol of London that is often mistaken for the London Bridge. Cross the Thames here for a beautiful view and a photo op! Be sure to get a photo of your next stop, the notorious London Tower.

Once home and execution sight of London's most infamous prisoners, including Sir William Wallace, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Anne Boleyn, the ancient fortress is now a museum and home to the Crown Jewels of England. The Tower is always bustling with tourists, so if you do plan to take the tour, be sure to arrive early as lines begin to swell in the afternoon.

Another route that will bring you past many equally impressive sites, begins at Buckingham Palace. This structure is more historically impressive than architecturally. Home to the Royal family since 1762, it is nonetheless a must-see when in London.

Though you can't stop in for a spot of tea with the queen, during the summer months visitors can pay to take a tour of the State Room, Grand Staircase, and Throne Room, as well as the Picture Gallery, which displays masterpieces by Van Dyck, Rembrandt, and others.

The Palace's most popular attraction, however, is just outside, and free of charge - the Changing of the Guard.

The schedule for the Changing of the Guard ceremony is variable at best. In theory, the guard is changed at 11:30 daily from some time in April to mid-July, at which time it goes on its winter schedule of that is, alternating days. No matter what time of the year, arrive early to secure a clear view (as early as 10:30 a.m.). And be sure to check locally for last minute changes due to weather conditions or just whim.

Once you have seen this world famous spectacle, head down Birdcage Walk, a scenic road along the southern edge of St. James Park

towards the River Thames. Before reaching the river, you will come upon Westminster Abbey.

Construction for the abbey was started in about 1045 by King Edward. With the exception of Edward V and Edward VIII who were never crowned, the abbey has held every royal coronation since 1066 and is the burial site for hundreds of kings, statesmen, poets, scientists, warriors, and musicians.

You can see inside Westminster Abbey for free. There is no charge for visitors who are there to worship, but they rely on admission fees (a steep 10 pounds) from visitors to cover running costs.

Whether you're a praying customer or a paying one, *Evensong* is worth it! Listening to this performance of the abbey choir's in this breathtaking Gothic church is a heavenly experience. *Evensong* takes place at 5 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, plus afternoon performances at 3 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

After your tour of the Royal Abbey, continue heading towards the river and you will come upon the next stop on this walking tour - the British Houses of Parliament. This former royal palace has been a center of authority for over 1,000 years. Home to the royal family until 1512, this massive building is now home to both legislative bodies: the Commons and the Lords.

Parliament is open to all members of the United Kingdom public and overseas visitors. Visitors can watch British lawmakers in white wigs as they make and argue laws. Visitors can also attend debates and committee meetings or tour the buildings. Overseas visitors may only tour the building during its summer opening.

Located on the north end of the Houses of Parliament is the iconic "symbol of London" and world's most famous clock, often referred to as Big Ben, but officially named the Great Bell. Tours of Big Ben are currently not open to tourists; however visitors can get a great

view of the tower from the next stop on the tour - the British Airway's London Eye.

Built as a Millennium landmark, the London Eye rises 443 feet above Jubilee Gardens on the South Bank of the Thames. From this height, 15,000 passengers a day, carried in 32 glass observation pods, can view up to 25 miles over the city and beyond. Although a ride on the Eye costs the equivalent of \$30, the panoramic view of London is unrivaled, and you can get a 10 percent discount for purchasing tickets online.

London has hundreds of museums and exhibitions large and small, and many of the best ones offer free admission, charging only for entrance to special exhibits. The following are must-see freebies for art lovers.

The British Museum is thought to hold one of the world's most extensive collections of art and artifacts, including a vast collection of Eastern antiquities.

To view an extensive collection of Western paintings, head to the National Gallery, where all the major schools from the 13th to 20th century are represented.

The Tate Britain Museum houses the national collection of British art from the 16th century to present, while the Tate Modern Museum is home to an extensive collection of 20th century art and is considered one of the most important modern art galleries.

Other free attractions in London include the British Museum, the National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, the Imperial War Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum, Natural History Museum, and Science Museum

After a long day of exploring, what could be more enjoyable than partaking in the quintessentially English afternoon tea? Fancy a cup without the upscale price tag of the Ritz?

Many cafés and smaller hotels offer up an equally satisfying spread, and you don't have to wear your Sunday best to get in the door.

Prefer a pint and pub food to tea and crumpets? Bellying up to the bar in one of London's many pubs is a must for "of age" tourists, even if it's not for a pint of English ale. Pubs are known for having very reasonable prices and hearty, traditional English food, such as bangers and mash (sausage with mashed potatoes), toad in the whole (sausage baked in Yorkshire pudding), and of course, fish and chips.

Not sure where to go? Asking for recommendations from locals will often lead you to good deals and great food!

From afternoon tea to the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, London abounds with the culture and charm of days gone by. There is so much to see and do in this bustling metropolis and you can experience it all, even on a budget!



Shakespeare's Globe Theater on London South Bank

Story and photos by Jodi Ward
Bavarian News, USAG Grafenwöhr